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## **GEOPOLITICAL INFLUENCE OF AFGHANISTAN'S NEIGHBORS ON THE COUNTRY'S DOMESTIC AND FOREIGN POLICIES**

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### **Abstract**

Afghanistan is one of the most populous countries in the world. This paper examines the geopolitical impacts of Afghanistan's neighboring countries on its domestic and foreign policies, highlighting their critical role in shaping the country's policies amidst regional and global developments. The study employs a mixed-methods approach, integrating both quantitative and qualitative data to provide a comprehensive understanding of the subject. The results indicate that economic and trade collaborations between Afghanistan and its neighbors, particularly China and Pakistan, have significantly contributed to Afghanistan's economic and infrastructural development. The findings also indicate that cultural and historical ties with Iran and India have played a pivotal role in strengthening regional security and fostering regional cooperation with Afghanistan. In addition, interviews and document content analysis demonstrate the critical role of Central Asian countries in enhancing regional security. The research seeks to provide recommendations for fostering better cooperation and more effective policy frameworks in Afghanistan.

**Keywords:** Geopolitics, Neighbors, Domestic Policy, Foreign Policy, Regional Security

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Afghanistan, located at the crossroads of Asia, has long been at the center of global geopolitical attention. Its unique geographical positioning makes it a strategic bridge between Central Asia, South Asia, and the Middle East. Throughout its history, Afghanistan has witnessed the influence and intervention of major regional and global powers (Sun et al., 2024; Yar & Zarghani, 2024). This paper aims to explore the geopolitical impacts of Afghanistan's neighbors on the country's domestic and foreign policies. One of the primary factors contributing to Afghanistan's geopolitical significance is its geographic location. Afghanistan shares borders with Pakistan, Iran, China, India, and the Central Asian republics. Each of these neighboring countries has specific interests and objectives regarding Afghanistan, which influence the country's domestic and foreign policies. For example, Pakistan has consistently prioritized influencing Afghanistan's policies for strategic and security reasons (Armitage et al., 2010; Bashir, 2023; Saikal, 2014; Tahir & Hussain, 2021; YAR et al., 2023).

Iran, due to its cultural and historical proximity to Afghanistan, plays a pivotal role in the country's cultural, economic, and political development. The migration of Afghan nationals to Iran and the economic interactions between the two countries are key factors that shape Afghanistan's policies (HASHEMI & ÖZEY, 2020; KARATAŞ, 2022; Siavoshi, 2024; Zandi-Navgran et al., 2024; Zandi-Navgran et al., 2024). China, as a major global economic power, has made significant investments in Afghanistan's infrastructure and plays a crucial role in ensuring regional security (Weinbaum, 2021; Yawar, 2024).

India, with its historical and cultural ties to Afghanistan, has provided considerable assistance in the country's development and reconstruction. India's investments in infrastructure projects and education have been instrumental in strengthening bilateral relations and increasing India's influence in the region. Central Asian countries, due to their proximity

to Afghanistan and shared security and economic interests, also directly influence Afghanistan's policies (Stepanova, 2022).

This paper explores the role and impact of these countries on Afghanistan's domestic and foreign policies, aiming to provide recommendations for improving relations and strengthening the country's policies. The primary objective of this research is to better understand the geopolitical effects of Afghanistan's neighbors on political decision-making and to propose strategies for improving the country's security and economic conditions (Yar & Ihsan, 2024).

This paper examines the geopolitical impacts of Afghanistan's neighboring countries on its domestic and foreign policies, highlighting their critical role in shaping the nation's strategies amidst regional and global developments. The study aims to analyze how these neighboring countries influence Afghanistan's internal and external affairs, identify their roles in enhancing the country's security and stability, and propose strategies to improve relations and strengthen Afghanistan's policies. Through this analysis, the research seeks to provide recommendations for fostering better cooperation and more effective policy frameworks in Afghanistan.

This study poses several research questions aimed at understanding the influence of Afghanistan's neighbors on the country's domestic and foreign policies, their roles in enhancing security and stability, and strategies for improving relations with these neighboring countries. The significance of this research lies in its exploration of the geopolitical impacts that neighboring countries have on Afghanistan. Key findings suggest that economic and trade cooperation can significantly aid in Afghanistan's economic and infrastructure development, enhancing living standards and social welfare. Additionally, understanding the role of neighboring countries in reinforcing security can help policymakers devise effective strategies to address security challenges while improving international relations and regional diplomacy.

The study also introduces several innovations that enhance its quality and value. By employing a mixed-methods approach, it provides a comprehensive analysis of the geopolitical influences at play, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative data. The research offers a detailed examination of various factors—economic, cultural, political, and security—affecting Afghanistan's relations with its neighbors, culminating in actionable policy recommendations. Furthermore, the use of current and credible sources bolsters the academic integrity of the findings, while the focus on cultural and historical dimensions underscores their importance in shaping Afghanistan's domestic and foreign policies.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

The research methodology for examining the geopolitical impacts of Afghanistan's neighbors on its domestic and foreign policies employed a mixed-methods approach, integrating both quantitative and qualitative data to provide a comprehensive understanding of the subject. The quantitative component involved analyzing statistical data related to trade, economic, and military relations between Afghanistan and its neighbors, sourced from reputable international databases. In contrast, qualitative methods encompassed content analysis of relevant documents, interviews with experts, and reviews of news reports to deepen the understanding of the geopolitical dynamics at play.

Data collection tools included a structured questionnaire aimed at gathering quantitative data regarding political, economic, cultural, and security relations between Afghanistan and its neighbors. This questionnaire targeted experts, politicians, and researchers in geopolitics. Additionally, semi-structured interviews were conducted with experts in international relations to obtain qualitative insights into the geopolitical impacts on Afghanistan's policies. Document analysis involved collecting and examining reports from international organizations, academic papers, and credible news sources. Once the data was collected, quantitative data was analyzed using statistical software such as SPSS or Excel, while qualitative data underwent content

analysis and thematic categorization. The integration of both analyses yielded a comprehensive picture of the influences that Afghanistan's neighbors exerted on the country's policies.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **Analysis and Interpretation of Quantitative Data**

Based on the analysis of the data collected from questionnaires, economic and trade relations between Afghanistan and its neighbors, particularly China and Pakistan, have significantly contributed to Afghanistan's economic development. Statistical analysis indicates that economic cooperation with China and Pakistan has led to increased exports and imports, improved infrastructure, and the creation of job opportunities in Afghanistan. Moreover, statistical data highlight the positive impact of Chinese infrastructure projects in Afghanistan on the country's development. Projects such as the Aynak Copper Mine and the Salma Dam serve as successful examples of foreign investment in Afghanistan.

### **Qualitative Findings**

The analysis of qualitative data reveals that cultural and historical ties with Iran and India have played a pivotal role in strengthening Afghanistan's political and social relations. Interviews conducted with experts and researchers underscore the positive influence of cultural and historical interactions on the consolidation of bilateral relations.

Furthermore, interviews and document content analysis demonstrate the critical role of Central Asian countries in enhancing regional security and fostering regional cooperation with Afghanistan. These collaborations have contributed to reducing security threats and promoting regional stability (Allison, 2004; Bailes & Dunay, 2007).

### **Addressing Research Questions**

#### ***Question 1: How do Afghanistan's neighbors influence its domestic and foreign policies?***

The findings indicate that Afghanistan's neighbors influence its domestic and foreign policies through economic, trade, cultural, and security cooperation. For instance, economic collaboration with China and Pakistan has supported Afghanistan's infrastructure and economic development. Similarly, cultural and historical ties with Iran and India have strengthened Afghanistan's political and social relations.

#### ***Question 2: What role do Afghanistan's neighbors play in strengthening its security and stability?***

The findings show that Afghanistan's neighbors play a crucial role in enhancing its security and stability. Central Asian countries, through security and intelligence cooperation, have helped reduce security threats and increase regional stability (Allison, 2004; Bailes & Dunay, 2007). Additionally, China has contributed to improving Afghanistan's security situation by training and equipping Afghan security forces and providing military and intelligence assistance.

### **Discussion of Results**

The research findings underscore the critical role of Afghanistan's neighbors in shaping its domestic and foreign policies. Economic and trade cooperation with China and Pakistan has contributed to Afghanistan's economic and infrastructural development and created new employment opportunities. These partnerships have not only improved Afghanistan's economic conditions but also strengthened political and social ties between the countries.

Cultural and historical relations with Iran and India have similarly played a significant role in fostering Afghanistan's political and social stability. These interactions have facilitated bilateral cooperation and reinforced political ties. The findings highlight the importance of

maintaining and strengthening cultural and historical relations with Afghanistan's neighbors for the country's development and progress.

Moreover, the research shows that security and intelligence cooperation with Central Asian countries and China has been instrumental in mitigating security threats and enhancing regional stability. Such collaborations have been vital in addressing shared challenges such as terrorism and drug trafficking, thereby contributing to regional security (Allison, 2004; Bailes & Dunay, 2007).

### **Case Studies**

#### ***Case Study: Aynak Copper Mine Project***

Location: Logar Province, Afghanistan

Involved Country: China

Description: The Aynak Copper Mine project is one of the largest foreign investment initiatives in Afghanistan, undertaken by a Chinese company (MCC). Due to the vast copper resources in the region and China's need for raw materials, the project holds strategic importance.

Impacts:

- Economic: The project has created job opportunities and improved the local economy. Additionally, tax revenues generated from the project have supported infrastructure development and public services in Logar Province.
- Social: The project has improved the socio-economic conditions of the local population and increased access to education and healthcare services.
- Political: China's investment in this project highlights Afghanistan's geopolitical significance and China's efforts to expand its regional influence.

#### ***Case Study: Salma Dam Project***

Location: Herat Province, Afghanistan

Involved Country: India

Description: The Salma Dam project is one of India's most significant developmental initiatives in Afghanistan. Constructed on the Hari River, the dam was designed to generate electricity and provide water for agriculture and domestic use.

Impacts:

- Economic: The dam has improved energy and water infrastructure in Herat. Its electricity generation capacity has boosted the country's energy production, reducing dependence on external sources.
- Social: The project has enhanced the livelihoods of local communities and created new employment opportunities. Additionally, the provision of water for agriculture has increased agricultural output, benefiting farmers economically.
- Political: India's involvement in the project reflects its close and friendly relations with Afghanistan and its efforts to strengthen its regional presence.

#### ***Case Study: Security Cooperation between Afghanistan and Central Asian Countries***

Location: Border regions of Afghanistan with Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan

Involved Countries: Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan

Description: Security cooperation between Afghanistan and Central Asian countries focuses on addressing shared threats such as terrorism, drug trafficking, and organized crime. This collaboration includes joint military exercises, intelligence sharing, and regional security initiatives.

Impacts:

- Security: These partnerships have reduced security threats in border areas and enhanced regional stability. Joint military exercises and intelligence exchanges have strengthened the military and security capabilities of the involved countries (Allison, 2004).
- Political: This cooperation has bolstered political ties between Afghanistan and Central Asian states, playing a vital role in fostering regional diplomacy.

## CONCLUSION

This research explored the geopolitical influences of Afghanistan's neighbors on its domestic and foreign policies, revealing that economic and trade collaborations with China and Pakistan have significantly contributed to Afghanistan's development, while cultural ties with Iran and India have strengthened political and social relations. Central Asian countries have also played a crucial role in enhancing security and promoting regional cooperation. The findings emphasize the potential of these relationships to foster economic growth and stability, providing valuable insights for policymakers. Future research is suggested in several areas, including the long-term impacts of infrastructure projects, the role of regional organizations like the Shanghai Cooperation Organization in security, the implications of climate change, and the influence of Afghan migrants in neighboring countries. These inquiries aim to deepen understanding of Afghanistan's geopolitical landscape and inform effective policy strategies while addressing the limitations faced in the study.

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